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THURSDAY, February 6, 1936

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "HOUSEPLANT HEALTH," Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry
U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Homemakers, how does your garden grow? How is the health of your houseplants these February days?

The more W.R.B., your garden adviser, tells me about caring for plants, the more I think of caring for human growing things. Like a baby, a house plant needs the right food, the right amount of water to drink, the right surroundings, plenty of sunshine, frequent baths, and special treatment in case of illness.

A couple of weeks ago we discussed soil and watering and the best atmosphere for houseplant health. Today I'd like to pass along news to you about sunshine, baths, and plant ills.

Plants can't thrive without sunshine anymore than babies can--at least, most plants. And to give indoor plants the sunshine they need is usually a difficult job. The best you can usually do is to keep them in a south window and give them the benefit of the rays that come slanting through the pane. When plants are in their natural environment outdoors, or when they are in greenhouses, they can get full sunshine for 6 or 7 hours a day on bright days. And even on cloudy days, they get much more diffused light outdoors than they possibly can in the house. Of course, all plants don't require the same amount of light. Many ferns, palms and other foliage plants can get along with strong reflected light of a north window. But even they will do better with some sunlight each day.

Now about baths. The dust and soot that gathers on the leaves of plants handicaps their growth. Outdoors, the rain gives plants a natural bath. Indoors, they require baths just the same. W.R.B. advises a cool soap-and-water bath for the leaves every few weeks followed by a rinse in cool, clear water. He says plants will take a good deal of soap--both the foliage and the stems--with benefit, if the soapy water does not get into the soil. The best way to bathe your plant is to lay it on its side and sponge off each leaf carefully with a piece of absorbent cotton dipped in a cool suds of mild soap. Sponge each leaf with the suds; then rinse each leaf with cold, clear water to remove the soap. Be sure not to let the soapy water drain into the soil.

Fortunately, houseplants don't suffer from measles or whooping cough. But they have their own ills, among them insects like plant lice, mealy bugs, red

spider or scale insects. Examine your houseplants frequently for such troubles, so they don't get a head start before you begin treatment. Fortunately, the remedy for many of them is simple. A soap-and-water bath for leaves and stems is one of the best cures. A teaspoon of nicotine sulphate added to each gallon of soapy water will help destroy most insects.

Some of the worst enemies of house plants are the so-called "scale insects." These are soft-bodied insects that live under hard, brown, round or oval scales something like miniature oyster-shells. These scales are difficult to remove from leaves and stems. But they will come off with a soap and water wash. And again the addition of nicotine sulphate to the soapsuds helps.

Another houseplant enemy is the mealybug. I don't know how he acquired the name. But I do know that this bug looks like a downy, white tuft on the underside of the leaf, often attached along the veins of the leaf, or in the leaf axils, or on the stem. Mealybugs often form large masses and are hard to get rid of. The soapsuds treatment will help. But you will also need to go over the afflicted plant daily and remove each bug with a toothpick until no more appear. Sometimes you can hold a plant under a faucet and wash off these bugs with running cold water.

A third insect that can do a lot of damage to your best plants is the spider mite or red spider. This little red or yellow mite is hard to see with the naked eye. No wonder it often breeds unnoticed in large numbers and collects in tiny webs in the angles of the leaves or at the place where the leaf stalk attaches to the stem. You can check this insect by frequently spraying the plant with cold water. A soapsuds bath will help remove it. And a spray of soapsuds and nicotine sulphate will kill it. Dusting the plant with dusting sulphur or an insecticide dust also helps.

Still other kinds of insects that prey on house plants are the plant lice. They are soft, sucking insects--green, brown, or black, and they usually settle on the under side of the leaf and cause it to curl up and form a roof-like protection for their unwelcome visit. Once again, use a soapsuds bath or the nicotine-sulphate-soap wash or spray against them.

Once again, the 6 points for houseplant health are: right soil; right amount of watering; pure air of the proper moisture and temperature; frequent baths to keep the leaves clean; sunshine; and special treatment in case of attacks from insects--usually a soap-and-water wash with some nicotine sulphate is the best remedy.

